

# **The Region of Niagara**

**One Region**

**One Brand**

**One Agenda**

**Welcome to the  
City of Niagara**

**Population 450,000**

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# Introduction

Municipalities in Canada are not an order of government. Municipalities are primarily 'service delivery agencies', whose focus should be on the most effective and efficient delivery of services to enable their inhabitants to enjoy a prosperous future.

Although governments don't create jobs, they do create the environment for jobs to thrive. Just as critical to service delivery, municipalities also provide vital economic leadership through a host of mechanisms; incentive tools, streamlined process, and clear communication of a vision that is understandable by business.

People live in communities, but we work in cities. This is about jobs not sentimentality. Sentimentality is expensive.

Prior to regional government formation in 1970, there were 26 distinct municipal corporations in Niagara – cities, towns, townships and 'police villages. It is simply good business to conduct fulsome and healthy reviews. And the focus of such activities is to define a better future rather than to glorify (or hold onto) the past.

Niagara has and will always have many neighbourhoods, enduring through many rounds of municipal reform, some whose origins go back to over 200 years. Chippawa, Wellandport, Port Dalhousie, Dain City, Jordan, Beamsville, Grassie, Queenston, Stevensville, Merritton, Allanburg, and many more are still readily identifiable providing a 'sense of place' by those who call them home.

Our current model of municipal government in Niagara is well beyond its 'best before' date. Other regions in Ontario who have addressed their municipal governance shortcomings are able to compete effectively in the global economy – Our model promotes intra-Niagara competition, with little or no attention to global competitiveness. This is especially disconcerting as Niagara's economy is one that is still transitioning from its heavy industrial past.

**The biggest argument for consolidation is not financial, it is functional. A single-tier government would remove the huge amount of redundancy and noise that takes place within the current system.**

We have 126 politicians, chasing 13 structural agendas. In 2018 we collectively processed over \$1.8 billion dollars in capital and operating budgets at the lower and upper tier levels. We need to consolidate our agendas; we need to dramatically cut our number of elected officials and make each one accountable as a full-time resource.

Niagara to the rest of Ontario is one community, we have many similarities that bind us. What does the resident of Smithville have in common with the resident from Stevensville? Our history, our family and friend ties across the region, our faith communities, our sports rivalries, the OHL Niagara Ice Dogs, our respect for rural life, our two post-secondary facilities, and most importantly at this time... our economic circumstance. Niagara as a complete region is in crisis. We need leadership to help create economic energy for our residents to thrive.

We have a massive influx of new residents in Niagara, our profile is changing. The Toronto retiree now living in the new subdivision in Smithville has more in common with Torontonians who relocated to Niagara-on-the-Lake than their own neighbours who traditionally in West Lincoln are Dutch farmers who founded the town's agricultural heritage.

Most residents in Niagara don't know the stories we are about to share. Most people don't interface with government in the same manner as local business or development professionals may. But most know something is wrong. Most know we are not a thriving region and that we lag behind other regions.

We in the know, have a collective moral obligation to lead, to be brave, to play big, and to move with the world around us sharing a vision that is in synch with our environment. We can't stop the migration to Niagara, we need major infrastructure investments, and we need to be an effective piece of the provincial puzzle.

Here are our stories that help provide the local context of Niagara. The stories are honest and presented without any pecuniary interest, or fear of job loss. We are not professional writers or lobbyists. We are however experienced professionals and passionate Niagarans with a proven dedication to a region we love.

One Niagara Now is a not for profit association supported by dozens of business, academic, and professional leaders who want to re-ignite a Niagara that will serve our children. We have all served on non-profit boards, donated time and money to the community, and are hands on involved with daily life of Niagara.

We believe we are One Region, One Brand, and One Niagara. It is time for One Agenda. We are prepared to roll up our shirt sleeves and be positively engaged to help in the important transition of our 50-year-old governance model to our next chapter.

We look forward to developing the only solution that will work; The City of Niagara.

# Story 1: Our Challenging Physical Landscape

Healthy economic zones everywhere draw from a natural trading radius. That radius is critical to reach enough; suppliers, customers, and the right employees.

Niagara has a unique geographical challenge. We are a peninsula of approximately 50 kms in length and only 35 kms in width. Our natural trading radius is upended by water on two sides (Lakes Ontario and Erie), and an international border on our third side. As a result, we can only draw from a very limited radius. In simple terms if a business is located in the centre of Niagara, it can only draw from a maximum of 18 kms North, and 18 kms South.

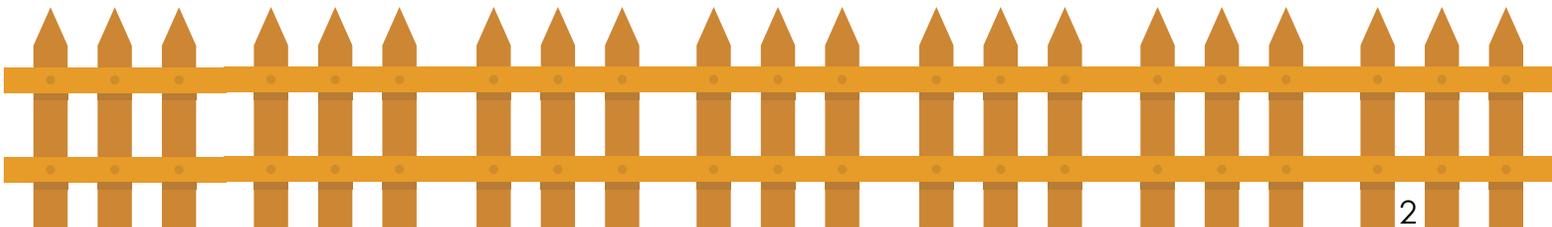
We also have 170 kms of shoreline on the Great Lakes system, 20 distinct urban areas and a significant amount of rural lands, and topographical challenges. Our agricultural lands are in the top 1% of all arable lands in Canada, we have numerous inland waterways, and a 'scattered' historical development pattern, which all contribute to challenges with service efficiency and effectiveness.

For Niagara to succeed we need to draw inputs and talent from Hamilton and the GTA. Because of the metrics of these hyperactive economies, we need to try harder to attract talent and economic energy beyond closer options.

With the City of Hamilton as our neighbor, a recently amalgamated region that is economically thriving, we need scale, top talent, and best in class governance to fairly compete. We need to become the City of Niagara.

## What you need to know

Niagara needs best in class governance to offset geographic challenges. We need to be able to fairly compete with our amalgamated neighbour that is economically thriving.



The economic genesis of Niagara can be largely traced to two critical events. The development of the Welland Canal and generation of hydro-electricity.

Beginning in 1824 the development of the Welland Canal ensured that Niagara would prosper as an industrial economy. Dozens of primary and secondary industries developed along the canal to move inputs and finished product to markets. With the addition of hydroelectric power in the late 1800's the industrialization of Niagara further developed as electricity was deemed more reliable closer to the source, and carried a lower price until the early 1900's.

Niagara enjoyed industrial prosperity for a number of following decades. In fact, in 1956 Welland had the highest per capita income in Canada, with the second highest per capita income belonging to Port Colborne.

With abundant prosperity for all the communities of Niagara developed independently. There was no reason to develop a culture of collaboration and mutual interest that has developed in other regional communities.

The forces of globalization have hit Niagara very hard. We have lost most of our industrial base relative to our standing when the Region of Niagara was created in 1970. The jobs lost have only been partially replaced by a growing tourism and retail sector, and at income levels dramatically lower. Niagara today is poorer, older, and less educated than many Ontario regions.

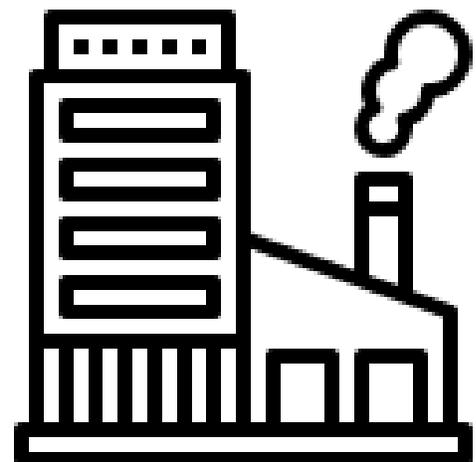
Consolidated, effective political and economic leadership is vital to Niagara more than many areas because of our decimated industrial base. We need vision, and commitment to that vision to bring needed prosperity. We have more brownfield sites, more dated infrastructure, and a shrinking commercial/industrial tax base.

Our system of government needs to be decisive at this critical time, we need to become The City of Niagara.

## What you need to know

We do not enjoy a legacy culture of collaboration and mutual interest that has developed in other regional communities.

Consolidated, effective political and economic leadership is vital to Niagara... more than many areas because of our decimated industrial base.



## Story 3: Getting Honest - We Fight

When looking at Niagara, don't confuse 'inter-municipal' as 'cooperative' or 'collaborative.' This terminology masks the functional reality that our local municipalities are actually in constant competition with one another – for growth, for investment, for senior government funding.

The absence of strong central leadership with one agenda, along with a harmonized property tax base, has had the unfortunate result of causing us to be more competitive internally in order to maintain our shrinking local tax revenues that support our overbuilt local government.

We find constant struggle between the elected representation of rural vs urban centres, east vs west, and north vs south, as well with our two largest cities. We have a systemic "zero sum" mentality within our elected leadership that creates endless accusations and scandals.

We have been very slow to embrace shared services and procurement plans in any meaningful way. Most municipal procurement is done on an individual basis.

In 2015, the Region of Niagara made a conscientious effort to review the potential amalgamation of all water services under one roof but local area municipalities (LAMS) did not want to collaborate. The concept of having one entity manage all water related services would create efficiencies and reduce duplication within the Region. Creating one department that would manage all service calls, water pipe maintenance, and customer management made sense. Our LAMs were not very receptive to the study being conducted and were asked to participate by providing billing information to the consultant to provide a report to the Region. LAMs were not very helpful and did not meet the guidelines in providing the required information. The fear was that this initiative would eventually lead to a total Regional amalgamation. The study cost over \$600K and unfortunately was shelved.

There have been many well cited examples within Niagara detailing location battles for infrastructure. The new Niagara Regional Police Services building location as an example, crowded the political agenda and polarized our politico for months. Of even larger discourse is the location of our primary healthcare facilities.

Niagara Health built a new state of the art hospital in west St. Catharines. The facility was largely built with funds provided by the Ontario government. Since its construction the southern tier communities and Niagara Falls have expressed their desire to have a new hospital facility built by the province for their communities.

After much discussion, the province expressed its support in principle for the project, with the understanding that a number of existing hospitals would be consolidated into the new facility. Then began the tug of war between two municipalities to have the new hospital within their municipal boundaries, notwithstanding the fact that the difference amounted to no more than 15 minutes one way or the other. This situation was/is entirely a bi-product of our governance structure, which encourages a "beggar thy neighbour" dynamic. The rancor created by this internal boundary dispute dominated the local political agenda for months if not more.

**In simple terms, we need the Province to right size our next chapter; The City of Niagara.**

## Story 4: We are a Confusing Place

There are thirteen municipal governments in Niagara, and most businesses here must work with all four levels of government.

It is easy for experienced people who deal with this subject matter to forget the confusion of daily living in a two tier region. Residents are constantly trying to understand who does what in Niagara. There is no such thing that “one call does it all”.

Municipalities perform roles in; fire, parks & rec, libraries, building permits, bylaw enforcement and transit.

At the regional level responsibilities include; roads, waste & recycling, landfill, potable water, waste water, social services, seniors, affordable housing, EMS, inspections of restaurants etc, emergency planning, and public health. Add in management of boards for; police services, affordable housing, and the conservation authority.

To make matters more confusing there is overlap in; roads, sewers, water lines and billing, planning, and economic development. Most people in Niagara have watched in dismay as a city snow plow lifts its blade as it enters a regional road, or a regional plow is “blade up” as it crosses a city street.

As hard as it is for residents, our tourists also suffer as a result of our dated governance model. Niagara is a world class tourist destination. Tourists visiting Niagara pumped \$2.4 billion into the local economy last year.

A consumer planning a visit to Niagara is presented with multiple websites, each touting their own specific “Brand of Niagara” including sites from all if not most municipalities and several other government sponsored sites. If you look at each of the above primary sites, you will see mixed messaging, and a lack of connectivity and collaboration. Each site vying for its own tourism spend.



In total there are at least 16 taxpayer funded sites all chasing the weary traveller. Niagara can do better. We need to embrace our globally loved brand as a single Region. Yes, we have destinations within Niagara that will always garner more interest such as Niagara Falls itself, and Niagara on the Lake etc. But our appeal is stronger if we can present our unified story as a regional destination.

We simply can't be who we need to be, until we are the City of Niagara.

## What you need to know

Our residents live in daily confusion and duplication caused by overlapping roles. Tourists visiting Niagara pumped \$2.4 billion into the local economy last year. In total there are at least 16 taxpayer funded sites all chasing the weary traveller. Niagara can do better.

## Story 5: Our Gap of Social Responsibility

Our dual tier system results in many confusing and irritating process for the people that are trying to build Niagara. But the two-tier system also allows the unintended consequence of allowing lower tiers to largely point to the Region of Niagara as the primary party responsible to solve our enormous social challenges. In our view this mentality derails a concerted and serious movement to deal with the significant issues facing Niagara today and catches a lot of people in a gap of social responsibility.

In 2012, the Niagara Community Observatory (NCO) calculated that poverty costs Niagara \$795 million in lost productivity, \$94 million in healthcare, \$51 million in crime, \$322 million in employment insurance, \$115 million to Ontario Works, and \$2 million for housing, hostels, and homelessness, for a total cost of \$1.38 billion every year. Today it is estimated that those figures are at least 30% higher given trends in, for example, affordable housing availability and food bank usage.

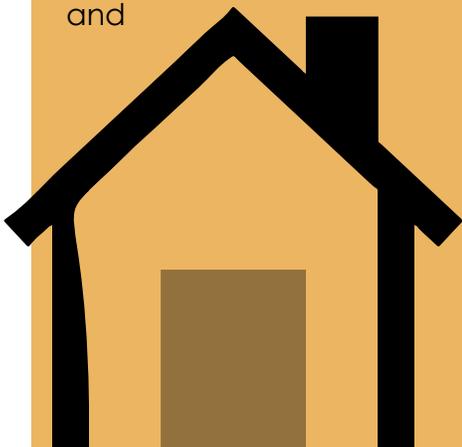
We are in need of a “single, unified” poverty reduction strategy.

Today we have over 24,000 households in Niagara in search of affordable housing. We also believe Social Service Costs & Service needs will continue to grow dramatically, Niagara has older than average demographics and has become a GTA retirement destination. Niagara's rental vacancy rate is alarming at 1%..

A strong illustration of the “responsibility finger pointing” caused by our two tier system is shared as follows;

The City Niagara Falls receives approximately \$26,000,000 annually in OLG payments as a host casino city. As a key jewel in the Niagara Falls tourism crown, the casino helps draw millions of visitors per year to the city. Together with the Falls itself and many other attractions and experiences, the tourism economy of Niagara Falls provides thousands of jobs.

Tourism jobs as a sector are not high income positions. This is not the fault of the operators, this is a global reality. While some are well paying, each day thousands of people work at minimum wage in roles such as; housekeeping, serving tables, parking cars, selling tickets, and maintenance. These roles are subject to seasonal layoffs, and often result in low inconsistent income for participants. As a result Niagara Falls has a significant poverty/affordability issue.



The City of Niagara Falls does relatively little to shoulder responsibility for helping to offset the difficulties encountered by its own tourism sector resident demographic. There is no poverty reduction strategy in place at the city, there is no stated agenda to embrace shared prosperity. The city position is that poverty reduction is the responsibility of the Region. But no, as you can guess, the Region is not entitled to any of the \$26,000,000.

We compete for highly mobile developers and investors. Vision, capital, and advisory professionals can go anywhere within the province. Niagara consistently fails to attract and retain development talent partly because of our complex two-tier system.

There is no consistency among Niagara municipalities. There are 12 Zoning bylaws, 12 Planning departments, and 12 Building departments. All municipalities circulate various elements to the Region, but not all follow the same protocol. As an example; Pelham and Thorold have the Region look after septic permits, Welland and Wainfleet manage their own.

Developers and entrepreneurs with vision need to deal with normal difficult economic and business realities and the long confusing process of approvals and construction in Niagara. Here is an example;

A small retail farm store in Thorold celebrated its grand opening in April 2019. The application to build started two years ago. It took slightly over a year to finalize the siteplan agreement, hampered by Thorold's zoning bylaw for the area which was dated and difficult to apply. The final site plan agreement with Thorold had to be circulated to the Region. During the follow on buildout a minor revision was done to the plan that had no impact on anything material but Thorold planning staff required the document be sent back to the Region who after some delay, said they had no comment.

The project required a Regional entrance permit for the driveway on Hwy 20 as a regional highway, but not for the driveway on Cataract Rd. because that road belongs to Thorold. The developer paid both Regional and Thorold Development Charges. The septic system permit came from the Region, but the building permit came from Thorold.

A sign permit was needed and obtained from Thorold, but if the sign was set 3' closer to the road the project would have also required a sign permit from the Region.

The scale and pervasiveness of our two-tier complexity encountered within the development sector is hard to overstate.

The City of St. Catharines maintains about 350 miles of roads. The Region of Niagara also maintains about 50 miles of roads within St. Catharines. In addition to this the Region owns a number of sewers in St. Catharines. This is a common dynamic across Niagara. When engineering works are required and there is impact (eg connection to services or access) in any measure to either system both levels need to grant approval. There is a frustrating delay, duplication of paperwork, and an approval process with fees attached. Below is an example of a Scott Street, St. Catharines property.

A recent approval for a severance for a detached dwelling was granted by the City. Scott Street is a 2-lane local road. The Sanitary Sewer is owned by the Region of Niagara and has numerous local house lateral connections along its length. A new sanitary lateral is required by the City for the new lot. The Region will not permit a lateral for a new lot without a manhole connection (a big deal). The proponent has been trying to resolve this for 4 months – being bounced around by very competent nice people, leading to a meeting coming soon with at least 8 people to attend.

To help some of this frustration some City's and the Region have employed development "expeditors" which seems like a great concept, but there are still 4+ agencies to deal with and the "expeditor" only works for one of those agencies. It's not like they are jointly employed, so while they may know the system better than a developer; relationships, multiple points of contact, and multiple points of priority all still exist. So as the developer I may have one phone call to make, but the expeditor still has to make 3. Same amount of phone calls, just a common person making those calls. This is just not encouraging to our development community.

Common experience is also Improper advising over development charges; a particular City may forgo charges, or have a zero rate for industrial dc's (for example), but both layers of government may not have the same schedule. A project can be exempt from a city level charge, but not a regional level charge. Finally, there is often confusion at the time of application or beforehand, because an applicant doesn't submit to the region, the submission is to the municipality. Municipality's may not have knowledge and definitely can't speak for the Region at the pre-application or application stage which can result in unexpected charges and delays coming from the Regional level

# Story 7: Economies of Consolidation

We believe that there are many areas where savings will be realized with full amalgamation. Personnel costs, and redundant real estate costs, are key areas but internal operations as a collective will also be more efficient.

## Example 1- Software Billing Systems

Currently, LAMs (Local Area Municipalities) have their own software systems to manage all their respective business functions. There may be 3 LAMs with the same system within Niagara that was recently acquired. However, they are all run by local staff. In other words, all LAMs prepare water and tax bills individually. All have staff to prepare bills and mail to their respective customers.

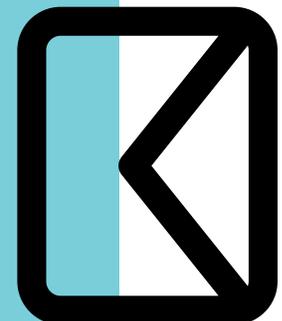
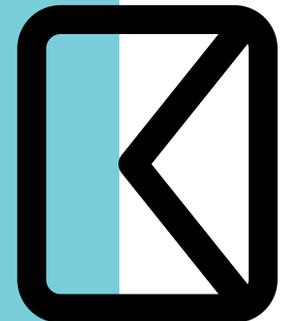
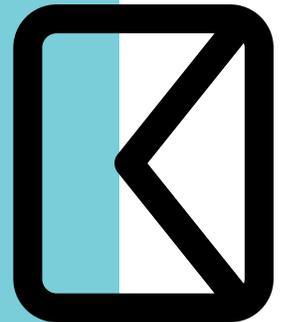
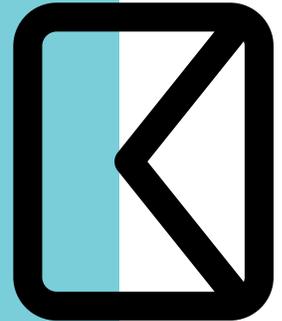
How much would the taxpayer save if all bills were prepared under one system? Today each LAM has their own system to operate, prepare bills, annual maintenance and licensing costs as well as the capital outlay for special printing equipment, mailing machines to stuff millions of bills per year. Collections is also a time-consuming function that may be better serviced under one centralized large department.

## Example 2 – Simple Over Time Costs

All LAMs have a Public Works Department. While some larger LAMs have various shifts in which they deploy their employees to conduct regular maintenance and repairs, the majority of the smaller LAMs only have their employees work regular work hours of 8:00 AM to 4:00PM daily with O.T. coverage on the weekends for emergency calls.

Why is this significant? Those LAMs that have (2 shift operations) 16 hour or 24/7 coverage have flexibility to manage the work they are able to perform ensuring improved customer service. Additionally, they limit the amount of OT they pay their employees during extreme weather event management requirements. As an example, during snow events, larger LAMs pay their employees regular pay to conduct snow removal throughout their communities. This also occurs frequently with water pipe repairs.

For many LAMs this is a significant cost that can be almost totally eliminated with a One Niagara solution.



As one would imagine each LAM maintains many sites to house various municipal services and works. For the most part, most main municipal administration offices are located well away from other municipal offices. Public works yards, libraries, arena's and other sites could be better utilized with removal of our legacy municipal boundaries. Fire Services however seem to have multiple obvious points of overlap that are clear opportunities for rationalization. An overall Fire Review needs to be conducted for all of Niagara

Niagara has one Police Service, but 12 Fire Services. We have 12 Fire chiefs and likely upwards of 50 fire stations across the region. Fire Protection is a significant part of most LAM budgets typically reaching 25%. Fire protection is a significant expense to the taxpayer.

LAMs build their stations based on their individual community needs and centre their stations accordingly. However, as we grow and expand, there must be some consideration given to build stations to serve the community as a whole and not just for individual LAM needs. In other words, why do we have fire stations 1 or 2 miles away from each other in different communities? Why couldn't we have an amalgamated fire department and place the fire stations where they serve the community best. As examples consider these two sets of stations;

## Story 8: Duplication of Service Infrastructure

### St.Catharines & Thorold

Thorold needs a new firehall. The existing primary downtown station is budgeted at approximately 6 million dollars and is constantly deferred. St Catharines built a beautiful state of the art firehall (Station #4) in 2013 in south St.Catharines only a couple of kilometres from the border with Thorold. The two buildings are 3.4 kms apart. There is no reason that a St.Catharines hose can't put out a Thorold Fire.

Administratively, Thorold did explore the idea of fire amalgamation with St.Catharines when Fire Station 4 was built. Unfortunately, Thorold Council was never really interested in the concept and just went thru the motions of showing interest. The initiative didn't gain any traction and was dropped.

Port Colborne and Wainfleet shared a Fire Chief for a number of years – but alas, that fell through;

In 1999, the fire chiefs of Grimsby, Lincoln, Pelham, Wainfleet and West Lincoln brought forward a merger proposal that was focused on better, more effective service delivery – unfortunately, it died a quick death because of some politically-driven notion that to merge fire services was to give up municipal political autonomy

One City of Niagara would rationalize overlapping sites and right size our collective infrastructure.

### Niagara Falls & Welland

Niagara Falls and Welland each maintain Firehalls that are 3.7 kms apart.



## Story 9: Encumbered Process - The Lincoln Compost Facility

Our two-tier structure is exhausting particularly when unusual or forward-thinking proposals are brought forward that directly impact the policies of both tiers.

Walker Environmental is a 5th Generation family owned company located in Niagara. The family is likely the largest philanthropic groups within the region.

Recently Walker Environmental spent 7 years and over \$1,000,000 on a planning application in the Town of Lincoln for a leaf and yard waste processing site. Although the Mayor at the time was initially supportive, based on public NIMBY backlash, he came out against the project.

Then followed a long, protracted, two-tier planning process that ultimately went to the OMB. The Company dropped the application at OMB and moved on to other options in other jurisdictions.

Where did the application fail? The smaller lower tier municipality did not have the planning staff on board to review application and hired a "peer review consultant". The Peer review was positive to the company and the application, however Council still voted against the project. Upper Tier (Region) told the applicant they would "never go against the decision of the lower tier".

The applicant dropped the case after 7 years of process despite the peer review being positive because neither level of government would support it.

Single tier planning would have taken half the time. One Niagara would have a "plan" detailing how to zone for strategically important infrastructure such as composting sites. One Niagara would have the planning staff to deal with the application in reasonable time frame. Local input would have been heard as part of the process along with broader infrastructure issues of strategic importance. Walker Environmental would have invested money and created jobs in Niagara instead of Caledon (where the company ultimately set up shop).

Visionary projects often face an uphill battle in Niagara. One Niagara, One City would be more decisive, and have deeper bench strength to deal with project requirements.

## What you need to know

Single tier planning would take less time. The strategic considerations on how to zone for important infrastructure would already be in place.

# Story 10: Exhausting Land Use Planning Process

Today there are 13 different planning departments in the region, and many planning matters approved at the lower-tier level must then pass through the upper-tier. We have twelve nuanced interpretations, meaning confusion for investors, developers, the public, and anyone else with an interest in a consistently applied 'region-wide' land use regime

A recent study of 18 of Niagara's leading developers by an independent research firm (PMA Brethour) resulted in the following statements from survey respondents and others:

*"The planning processes in Niagara are behind what we have experienced in the GTA. The planning regime locally is not receptive or understands how processes, such as occupancy, grading approvals, site plan approval, part-lot control, urban design can make the development process very slow. Municipalities do not realize the length of time it takes from site acquisition, approvals, site servicing, house construction and finally assumption takes. In Niagara my experience the entire process can take 5-7 years. It is hard for small builders/ developers to grow as funds in letters of credit are tied up for such longer periods of time. There is not a strong sense of Regional pull in one direction. Job growth is also very slow in the Region. Things are starting to change but job growth will lead to ensuring the market place grows and attracts a wider market..."*

*"Regional Planning department is obstructionist and has a very poor culture. They search in order to create problems."*

*"We need lots to build on. There is land in St. Catharines but the green belt legislation needs to be adjusted. City workers don't have a clue how "real" life works. I have talked to them. If new lots are not created the tax base remains stagnant..."*

*"There is no consistency among the municipalities. 12 Zoning bylaws. 12 Planning departments. 12 Building departments. All of them circulate things to the Region, but not all the same. Pelham and Thorold have the Region look after septic permits, Welland and Wainfleet do their own. Frustration doesn't even begin to describe it."*

*"Simple Community Improvement Plan incentives are more complicated in a two tier system. Delays in my experience were measured in years not months."*

The City of Niagara will have one level of approvals and a common interpretation of the rules. We will build the confidence of the investment community and begin to really grow.

## What you need to know

The planning processes in Niagara are behind those in the GTA.

Under the current governance structure, job growth is weak.



# Story 11: Dysfunctional Economic Development

After the municipal elections of 2006 both the City of St Catharines and the Niagara Economic Development Corporation (NEDC), acting for the Region, started drafting comprehensive economic development strategies for approval and implementation. Because there was an effort to make certain that some persons sat on both committees, there was a degree of harmonization of the two separate plans. This has not happened since in updates of these plans. Nor has there been such a systematic attempt at developing coordinated economic strategies for the Region and other municipalities.

To this day we do not have a long-term integrated economic development strategy for the Region and its municipalities. After decades of dealing with our post industrial crisis the absence of these plans is outrageous.

It is also tragic that high functioning Economic Development which is so vitally important at this moment in the history of Niagara is effectively absent. Since 2006 there have been nine changes in leadership/learn-up periods at the Region of Niagara Economic Development Offices.

The highly competitive, non-collaborative nature of Niagara makes it impossible for our Region to present a single coordinated approach. Even the most conservative commentators regarding our governance acknowledge that our Regional Economic Development function is not effective. Quoted in a local paper below following a recent open forum on governance held at Brock University;

*"Siegel says that amalgamation could have positive changes including allowing Niagara to speak with one voice and benefiting the delivery of certain services. 'Amalgamation would eliminate the competition between area municipalities to enhance their tax base and would allow for the creation of one economic development agency representing the entire region'"*

Across the region at the LAM level there are mixed approaches to this important function. Some municipalities do not have an economic development department; such as Grimsby, Pelham, Wainfleet, West Lincoln.

Thorold has just decided to create its own department and as such is in the process of hiring an economic development officer to forward the interests of the less than 20,000 resident municipality. When in place, there will be fulltime economic development offices in St.Catharines, Welland, Niagara Falls, Fort Erie, Port Colborne, and Thorold. This is ridiculous in the business climate of today.

One of the initiatives that emerged out of the St Catharines economic development plans of 2006-07 and the NEDC plans of the same year (see above) was the development of what is today called Innovate Niagara, a start-up incubator/accelerator well integrated into the Ontario innovation networks centered in Waterloo at Communitech and MARS in Toronto. Niagara Falls wanted its own such incubator accelerator under its own control and oversight. Therefore, it did not favour creating a second office/facility of Innovate Niagara in the Falls, preferring and pursuing every other option instead.

When NEDC still existed, one of its duties was to plan and execute Niagara's week of lobbying "with one voice" for its priorities at Queens Park. The preparation involved a process of negotiating limited prioritized list of things to ask for. The agreement among all municipalities and the Region was to stick to that list, other priorities of individual municipalities requiring Ontario support were to happen apart from Niagara Week. Unfortunately, we were unable to adhere to the guideline as a collective and the initiative was dropped.

We are fragmented and our governance system allows this, facilitated this, and tacitly promotes this.

Without clear delimited shared priorities, we will never get anywhere. Our great success in this regard in recent years has been lobbying for daily, year-round GO service. Surely this is the exception that proves the rule.

As the City of Niagara our economic agenda will be clear and concise.

Everywhere else in the world it is called public transit, except here in Niagara, where we are fed the term "intermunicipal transit." This nomenclature is a direct symptom of our dysfunctional two-tier system – with the emphasis being placed on the qualifier term 'intermunicipal', that suggests that the customer is/are the municipalities themselves. This is a complete bastardization of what a public service is.

The public's need for effective, reliable, pan-Niagara service is not dictated by arbitrary municipal boundaries, nor by the parochial and insular interests of the service deliverer (the latter being the circumstance that has had us adopt code language like 'inter-municipal', as in 'don't touch my service and I won't touch yours and maybe somewhere along the line we may find non-threatening ways to cooperate, which may or may not have a positive impact on the overall 'public' service). Rather, it is driven by the public's need to access employment, education, health and recreation, community involvement including volunteerism, and more. It is also no coincidence that in these social areas opportunities are similarly not bound by arbitrary boundaries.

Rightsizing our transit –is a slow, arduous and divisive process that could be avoided if the focus was on service needs rather than who 'owns' transit – curiously, no such claim of ownership affected the transfer of solid waste management.

The quest for our limited version of inter-municipal transit in earnest has been underway for the past five years. During this time, the primary operators; St.Catharines, Welland, and Niagara Falls have been unable to develop even a limited service governance system. Leading the Mayor of St. Catharines to note this month; "This shouldn't be rocket science, this shouldn't take four or five years!"

Our Regional Transit is probably 20 years behind where it should be largely because the municipalities do not work together. It's a daily reality in Niagara that is clearly demonstrated when municipal financial resources are required, and our rigid small management structures need to collaborate.

Niagara's employers are asking for a good public transit system for their workforce and their customers, not to mention the role public transit plays in tourism, in healthcare, in poverty reduction and in community participation. Two demographics especially hard hit are students and members of the low-income workforce.

A local Brock student was in financial difficulty because she had to quit her weekend part-time job in Niagara Falls. She lived in the Western Hill district of St Catharines and did not own a car. She said it took her three hours each way to make the trip on each of Saturday and Sunday-12 hours in all- to work 8 hours each of the two days. The reason was that the several municipal transportation system schedules did not mesh.

Our unemployed residents who are trying to re-enter the workforce are constantly challenged by our lousy transit infrastructure. We are not as a society making life easy for people that want to work but don't possess the means for their own transportation. We know our residents will travel within the region for employment; they simply need a reasonable transit backbone to help facilitate this.

The Niagara District Airport is a municipal airport is an important regional asset. It is located within the Niagara-on-the-Lake boundaries and financially supported by only three surrounding municipalities - the cities of Niagara Falls, St Catharines, and the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Niagara needs to grow its airport capabilities. Our tourism and our industry would benefit from continued development of the site. Particularly as Pearson moves forward providing fewer short hop flights in its busy facilities, there is an opportunity for Niagara.

The facility can't grow to its potential under the limited 3 city model commission. We need to apply regional resources and commitment to this piece of our puzzle.

The City of Niagara would do a far better job of resourcing and growing both transit and the airport.

## Story 12: Regional Transportation Assets are 20 Years Late



## Story 13: Our Challenges Need Fulltime Effort

In our view political service was never intended to be a full-time job. Certainly not when the Region of Niagara was created in 1970. Unfortunately, this isn't then.

The complexity of the role of the municipal politician has increased greatly. Programs are complicated, often with multiple layers of government involvement. Finance has become far more complex, there are unions to deal with, and the legal exposure to everything is a primary concern in every municipal decision.

Above all else, the dollars involved now are mind boggling. The 2018 public spend between all 13 municipalities including both operating and capital budgets in Niagara was north of 1.8 billion dollars. This was managed by 126 people, each of whom approved and managed just over \$14,000,000 in spending, and only 3 of our 126 politicians are fulltime. Only the mayors of Niagara Falls, and St.Catharines along with the Chair of the Region of Niagara are the only fulltime roles.

97% of our elected representatives have other employment. They are our teachers, business persons, mechanics, chefs, and every other role imaginable. Each are presented with a massive council agenda including reports that they are expected to read and understand. We don't see how anyone can effectively perform this role as a part time participant.

None of our part time elected positions are exceptionally well-paying. A lower-tier councillor will take home about \$20,000 for a year on average in Niagara.

The argument of reduced access to representation is mitigated with; fulltime hours, an easy to find location at a City of Niagara office, and the use of technology. We believe that representation quality can still be very high

The world is not the same as it was in 1970. The Worldwide Web wasn't accessible by the public until 1991. There are many self-serve information options and easy communication options to reach our representatives.

The need to attract top talent is significant. We spend so much money at the decision level not to have the best talent is criminal.

Creating a single council with fewer seats would mean more work for ward councilors, but would also allow a higher rate of pay, and that would allow more working-age people, who under the current system are largely excluded from municipal politics to get involved.

We also believe in term limits with a single election "sit out".

The City of Niagara represented by fulltime top talent is a game changer for this region.

## What you need to know

97% of our current elected representatives are part time. The job is too complex. With over \$14 million dollars a year in approvals per representative, we need to attract top talent as full time roles.

# Story 14: Becoming a Strong Provincial Partner

The economic fortunes of the City of Hamilton have improved exponentially following their latest round of municipal reform. Gone are the days of internecine competitiveness among six local municipal governments for investment/economic development, with the new reality being a unified 'flexing' of economic might, the focus of energy being on the competition beyond its borders rather than within.

Located just next door, Niagara needs to become a region that leads, not lags. As the front door to Ontario, and the last link to the United States, we need to transform into a singular decisive economic engine.

We need to enable our own prosperity, and to become a strong, dependable and predictable partner within the province. We want to be a region where new ideas are tested, upper tier programs can be rolled out easily, and support decisions are made by broad minded top talent.

We know through multiple feedback sources that Niagara is looked at cautiously by upper tier bodies as a complicated and divisive place to trial new programs. We need to change that dynamic.

Our transportation infrastructure is in need of expansion to serve the province for the next 50 years. Our canal lands and the midpen corridor would be much better served by a single governance body able to help facilitate needed growth.

The Niagara-Hamilton area is ripe for stepped-up economic development because of its potential as an expanded "National Trade Corridor," According to a 2019 House of Commons standing committee interim report.

The Hamilton Port Authority is pushing to increase its role in the corridor through an ambitious plan to manage vacant industrial properties along the Welland Canal. To enable this bold step a single Niagara decision body would be a tremendous help.

*"We are out of land in Hamilton, and it just makes sense for us to be looking for opportunities in the Niagara region,"* noted Ian Hamilton, CEO of the HPA. Mr. Hamilton further believes the two ports with properties along the Welland Canal would be a formidable network to enhance trade.

In a quote that underscores the fundamental principles behind our quest to create the City of Niagara, Mr. Hamilton notes; *"We certainly think integrated transportation in southern Ontario is the logical way forward and tying together the marine components makes a lot of sense. You have one voice, one marketing division. You've got a way to leverage investments. It makes sense rather than being smaller and disjointed,"* said Hamilton.

Everybody knows about the outrageous gridlock between Hamilton and Toronto. But the Hamilton to Fort Erie leg of the QEW is not far behind. A new Commons interim report says it's become a major obstacle in realizing the "trade corridor" potential of the area, because transport trucks are being caught in the quagmire.

The standing committee on transport, infrastructure and communities report is calling for the federal government to support a mid-peninsula highway to relieve pressure on the QEW along with increased use of the St. Lawrence seaway for transporting cargo.

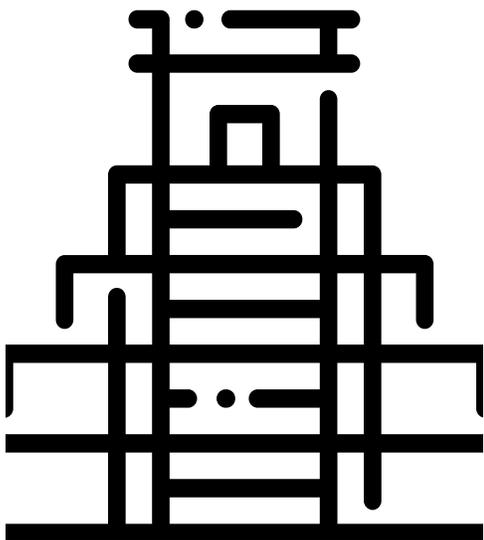
The interim report, called "Establishing a Canadian Transportation and Logistics Strategy," recommended the federal government *"recognize Canada's need for expedited and reliable access to the U.S. border, including across the Niagara region's congested international bridges, and cooperate with the government of Ontario and affected municipalities to consider the creation of a mid-peninsula transportation corridor."*

Ron Foxcroft, the CEO of Hamilton-based Fluke Transport, said;

*"The problem of over-the-highway gridlock has been staring us in the face for 25 years. It's costing millions of dollars. And it is costing opportunity,"* said Foxcroft. *"It's imperative that they build the mid-pen highway."*

## What you need to know

This triple majority is ineffective and burdensome when it comes to affecting any change to increase economic development.



Niagara has dealt with a few triple majority episodes recently with respect to Regional transit consolidation and an attempt by St. Catharines City council to change their governance structure to dual role councillors (those that would be elected to seats at both the City and Regional councils).

So while the various twelve municipalities are technically independent from one another, they are inextricably tied to each other when it comes to many decisions related to governance, service offerings and the like, the municipality is forced to go through a lengthy and burdensome process to effect change. In the age of faster decision-making, greater mobility and constituent desire for quicker responses, this process and current system severely restricts the ability to do so.

Given the process, many constituents are not even aware of these requirements and are found bewildered upon explanation.

In short a triple majority requires the following:

1. The Regional council to support the change with a majority vote in favor
2. A majority of the municipal councils (7 of 12 councils) to support the change with a majority vote in favor.
3. The supportive municipal councils must represent a majority of eligible voters across the entire Region in the most recent municipal elections.

This is beyond restrictive for any of the smaller municipalities to effect change, it is a very prominent roadblock for any municipality to even attempt the process. Not to mention, the time, energy, effort needed by advocacy groups or singular councils/municipalities themselves to properly educate 13 councils for support of an issue. The most recent attempts via the consolidate transit system while ultimately successful was an enormous roadshow. While democratic, it is ineffective and burdensome to be able to affect much needed changes to our economic development, planning, transportation and other initiatives that require collaboration amongst the current municipalities.

A one tier, one City of Niagara model would eliminate what is viewed by many as an unnecessary and impossible process.

## Story 15: Our Triple Majority Process Doesn't Work For Us

# The Only Solution for Niagara: One City

Niagara's population growth has fallen short of most, if not all, of the projections made in the last fifty years, and Niagara has already fallen behind forecasts in the first few years of the current 25-year Ontario projections. Population growth is a key component to economic success and access to a qualified labour force. With a population older than that of Ontario or Canada, and getting older, Niagara must broaden the base of working-age people if the number of retirees and their greater demands for services such as healthcare are not to become an overwhelming burden on the tax base.

Niagara Region has some of the higher property taxes rates of the different municipalities that were examined, with many being in the 1.3%-1.65% range of assessed value, compared to areas like Mississauga, Burlington, Oakville, and Toronto, which all have property tax rates under 0.9%.

At the end of the day the quest to become the City of Niagara is driven by jobs. Our "reset" is needed to clear our agendas of the small infighting that plagues Niagara and to attract top talent to help foster the economic energy we deserve.

Jobs are enabled by confident political leadership communicating a consistent clear message, by coordinated and predictable infrastructure placements, affordable taxation and simplicity of process.

Our group has grown by adopting two key baseline principles; we need to be honest, and we need to be brave. We need to act in the long-term best interests of future generations. This change isn't really for us, it is primarily for those that follow.

We did not start this process with a singular solution, even those that had a predisposition to a single city model have re-examined our challenges and our opportunities and all have emerged with the conviction that The City of Niagara is the only solution.

We have considered the new single city model as a collective and table the following City of Niagara solution elements;

- Similar to the Hamilton experience cited in the Ryder Report immediately appoint a Transition Board
- Follow the four-current provincial/riding configurations to ensure balanced decision making across all of Niagara reflecting; urban/rural interests, small vs. large centres, and east vs west.
- Within each riding, create up to 6 wards. This results in up to 24 full time elected councilors and one elected mayor (allowing greater representation than Hamilton).
- Include a mechanism to address current LAM debt/reserve imbalances. Perhaps localized legacy funds (10-year horizon) to be spent in the legacy municipality or surcharges in the case of deficits.
- 2 Term Limit with a single election "sit out" provision
- Ensure City of Niagara facilities are balanced throughout the city.
- Short decisive implementation period. There is no need to wait until the next planned local election cycle (2022).

# Conclusion

A multi-city approach for this region will not work. The gains from the amalgamation process are not linear. In other words, 75% fewer municipalities does not mean we will gain 75% of the benefits.

If Niagara adopted 3 or 4 cities we would still need a second tier entity for common services. We would rigidly adopt 3 or 4 economic agendas, and we would continue to fight for resources albeit as larger entities. We would continue our “small n” Niagara thinking. We would suffer the same basic expense and turmoil of single city amalgamation for very little if any gains.

Utility Boards don't work. We have seen challenges in Windsor and Halifax and they are not easily accountable.

In a 3 or 4 city model what would the names be? We will fight over the name Niagara. We are all Niagarans. Most of our tourism is located along the Niagara River, that important sector will never allow a name that isn't Niagara. Half of our population is located along the canal. The canal is an important transportation feature, but very few residents will want to live in Canal City. There will be a tremendous uproar.

The Toronto retiree now living in the new subdivision in Smithville has more in common with Torontonians who relocated to Niagara-on-the-Lake than their own neighbours who traditionally in West Lincoln are Dutch farmers who founded the town's agricultural heritage.

We do all have one thing in common; we are Niagarans.

There are few Niagarans that are as respected and well travelled as Don Ziraldo a recognized leader in the development of our wine industry. Don shared his view from his international context;

*“In representing Niagara Wines around the world including Europe and Asia, I can tell you that Niagara is a very, very, recognizable brand. I was born in St Catharines, but who cares. When I am asked where I live I either say Canada or Niagara. Both are respected and easily recognizable, positive brands. As founding Chairman of the VQA I know the power of a brand. Any plan that changes our region to three or four cities would be redundant and not recognizable.”*

We need to celebrate our connectivity. Together we would become be the 11th largest city in Canada, the 5th largest in Ontario. We would be more attractive to business opportunities and more relevant on many levels.

There are a number of our important organizations and have over recent years modernized their governance model to embrace Niagara as a single economic zone; the YMCA, United Way, and the Niagara Health System, Police Services, School Boards, as examples. Other service agencies are moving that way, like the Chambers of Commerce. And, still others were created with that span of service area geography in mind, such as Niagara Homebuilders Association, Brock University, Niagara College, Land Care Niagara, the Niagara Association of Realtors, the Niagara Woodlot Association and the Niagara Restoration Council.

We have an important moment in our hands. Likely the most important Niagara moment in 50 years. We need to be honest and we need to be brave. We need to play big; we need to have a future vision worthy of the founding legacy of Niagara that we hold.

We need to create The City of Niagara.

# 2018 Municipal Budget Amounts

Municipality	CapX Expenses	OpX Expenses	Total
Fort Erie	\$12,727,570	\$51,274,264	\$64,001,834
Grimsby	\$18,442,550	\$31,582,010	\$50,024,560
Lincoln	\$13,035,835	\$27,448,747	\$40,484,582
Niagara Falls	\$38,603,100	\$134,724,180	\$173,327,280
NOTL	\$9,000,000	\$10,000,000	\$19,000,000
Pelham	\$23,000,000	\$12,000,000	\$35,000,000
Port Colborne	\$2,000,000	\$15,000,000	\$17,000,000
St. Catharines	\$25,000,000	\$115,000,000	\$140,000,000
Thorold	\$16,000,000	\$20,000,000	\$36,000,000
Wainfleet	\$2,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$7,000,000
Welland	\$10,000,000	\$85,000,000	\$95,000,000
West Lincoln	\$4,000,000	\$6,000,000	\$10,000,000
TOTAL	\$173,809,055	\$513,029,201	\$686,838,256
Region of Niagara	\$187,000,000	\$934,000,000	\$1,121,000,000
Total	\$360,809,055	\$1,447,029,201	\$1,807,838,256
Total Number of Municipal Politicians			126

# OWN

One Niagara Now is a not for profit association supported by dozens of business, academic, and professional leaders who want to re-ignite a Niagara that will serve our children. We have all served on non-profit boards, donated time and money to the community, and are hands on involved with daily life of Niagara.